

Excerpts from [The Exhausted School](#):

Our form of schooling creates an abundance of social pathologies and contradicts the way children actually learn - sacrificing human potential to an obsession with hierarchy, order, routine, surveillance, and the creation of lifelong dependence on “expert” authority. This latter function of schooling has come to support many parasitic forms of employment in our economy. Bertrand Russell once called American schooling the most extreme social experiment in Western history, a mechanism to realize Plato’s *Republic*. (p23)

Meanwhile, something even more sinister was taking place - a fact we learned to our horror two weeks before the show. In the financing of such events, fund-raisers regularly call on sources well known to be supportive of such things. In the case of “The Exhausted School,” three such sources had taken the lead to contact Odysseus Group! Nothing could be more promising than that, it seemed. We were wrong. Each of our potential angels and a whole spread of others as yet untried were reached by some unknown agency and warned away from Carnegie Hall.

Who was doing this? Through some adroit detective work and drawing on favors owed, our volunteer fund-raiser disclosed her astonishing conclusion: It was the president of a prestigious foundation on Vanderbilt Avenue, she said, an institution which claimed hegemony in school reform! She confronted him, she continued, but he denied even knowing about Carnegie Hall. That was the clincher. She produced a photocopy of an informational inquiry about the event written by the president himself months before to a friend of hers!

Nothing could be done, of course, but press on. Eventually 1,024 people paid their way into Carnegie Hall in spite of the media blackout, the absence of advertising, and a desperate attempt on the part of “reformers” to destroy our attempt to establish a grass roots voice...(p24-25)

An education gives you the power to make your own decisions and a schooling teaches you to follow the lead of other people - not the same thing at all. (p27)

We live in a time of great school crisis, and that crisis is linked to a greater social crisis in the general community. We seem to have lost our identity. Children and old people are locked away from the business of the world to a degree without precedent - nobody talks to them anymore. Without children and old people mixing in daily life, a community has no future and no past, only a continuous present.

We live in networks, not communities. Everyone I know is lonely because of that. In some strange way school is a major actor in this tragedy, just as it is a major actor in the widening gulf among races and social classes. Using school as a sorting mechanism, we appear to be on the way to creating a caste system, complete with untouchables who wander through the subway trains begging, and sleep upon the streets

I've noticed a fascinating phenomenon in my 26 years of teaching: schools and schooling are increasingly irrelevant to the great enterprises of the planet. No one believes any more that scientists are made in science classes, or politicians in civics classes, or poets in English classes. The truth is that schools don't really teach anything except how to obey orders. This is a great mystery because thousands of human, caring people work in schools as teachers and aides, and even as administrators. But the abstract logic of the institution overwhelms their individual contributions. Although teachers *do* care and *do* work very hard, the institution is psychopathic - by which I mean it has no conscience.

How on earth did we ever accept the idea a government had the right to tell us where to go to school? How did we ever come to believe the State should tell our children what to think? (p29-30)

...But in a nation increasingly disintegrated and demoralized, in a national order where the only successful people are independent, self-reliant, confident, and individualistic, the products of schooling are irrelevant. Well-schooled people are irrelevant. They can sell film and razor blades, push paper and talk on telephones, make deals or sit mindlessly before a flickering computer terminal, but they hate to be alone with themselves. As human beings they are useless. (p32)

Much daily misery around us is caused by the fact our schools force children to grow up absurd. Any reform in schooling must deal with its absurdities: it is absurd and anti-life to be part of a system that compels you to sit in confinement with people exactly the same age and social class. That system effectively cuts you off from information you need to be sane, and cuts you off from your own past and future. It seals you into a continuous present much the same way television does. It is absurd and anti-life to be part of a system compelling you to listen to a stranger read poetry when you ache to learn to construct buildings; it is absurd and anti-life to sit with a stranger discussing the construction of buildings when the rush of language inside you makes you want to write a poem.

It is absurd and anti-life to move from cell to cell at the sound of a buzzer, every day of your natural youth, in an institution that allows you no private time or space.

What parent would allow such a horror to be inflicted if their own schooling had left them with the power to understand? (p32)

Two institutions control our children's lives - television and schooling, probably in that order. Both reduce the real world to a never-ending, nonstop abstraction. For most of history until recently, the time of a child would be occupied in real work, real charity, real adventures, real apprenticeships, in the realistic search for mentors who might teach what you really needed to learn. What that is, is of course, different for each of us.

A great deal of time was spent in community pursuits, practicing affection, negotiating, and studying every level of the society around it firsthand. Also in learning how to make a home, a living, and dozens of other tasks necessary to become a whole man or woman. *There was a continuity and comprehensiveness to life.* It was not fragmented into subjects and specialties to provide work for professionals, nor was it arranged into sequences it made no sense. The kind of education history reveals was administered most often by people you knew - not by total strangers arranged into a priesthood called "teachers." (p33)

Today the tabulation of hours in a young life reads like this: My children watch television 55 hours a week according to recent reports, and they sleep 56. That leaves them 57 hours in which to grow up strong and competent and whole. But my children attend school 30 hours more, spend eight hours preparing for school, and in goings and comings, and an additional 7 hours a week in something called "home"-work - although this is really more schoolwork except in "Newspeak." After those 45 school hours are removed a total of 12 hours remain each week from which to fashion a private person - one that can like, trust, and live with itself. Twelve hours. But my kids must eat, too, and that takes some time. Not much, because they've lost the tradition of family dining - how they learn to eat in school is best called "feeding" - but if we allot just 3 hours a week to evening feedings, we arrive at a net total of private time for each child of 9 hours.

It's not enough. It's not enough, is it? The richer the kid the less TV he watches, of course, but the rich kid's time is just as narrowly proscribed by his inevitable assignments to private lessons from more hired strangers, seldom in areas of his own actual choice.

This demented schedule is an efficient way to create dependent human beings, needy people unable to fill their own hours, unable to initiate lines of meaning to give substance and pleasure to their existence. It is a national disease, this dependency and aimlessness, and schooling and television and busy work - the total Chautauqua talk were package - has a lot to do with it.

Think of the things killing us as a nation: narcotic drugs, brainless competition, dishonesty, greed, recreational sex, the pornography of violence, gambling, alcohol, and the worst pornography of all - lives devoted to buying things, accumulation as a philosophy all of these are addictions of dependant personalities. That is what our brand of schooling must inevitably produce. A large fraction of our total economy has grown up around providing service and counseling to inadequate people - and inadequate people are the main product of government compulsion schools. (p33-34)

aA long line of Western thinkers, all of them childless men like Comte, have understood that breaking a child's ties with the past cracks him away from his own family. And separating parents and children has been the goal of childless male philosophers since Plato wrote about its value in *The Republic*. Without strong family ties, he said, children are easier subjects for central planning. Augustine knew that, and Erasmus, and Bacon, and Descartes, and Hobbes, and Rousseau - and all the other childless men who helped to architect the government schooling we have today. (p35)

The children I teach are uneasy with intimacy, solitude, or unguarded speech. They cannot deal with genuine intimacy because of the life-long habit of preserving the secret inner self beneath their public school personalities, personalities which must remain open at all times, as a prostitute's body is open to the constant inspection and ranking of strangers. Our children's public personalities are kept constantly under surveillance by authorities in an orgy of voyeurism. The outer persona of the children I teach is fabricated from artificial bits and pieces of behavior borrowed from television, or acquired by studying the preferences of school teachers. The real self is too small and vulnerable to bear long time exposure, because it has had no privacy in which to develop strength and integrity. Since exposure is required in intimate relationships, these must be avoided. My children are not who they pretend to be. Most of them aren't anybody at all, thanks to school. It's frightening. (p35)

Consider these famous people who were homeschooled for some or all of their school years: Authors William Blake, Charles Dickens, Pearl Buck, Agatha Christie and Margaret Atwood; social and political figures Benjamin Franklin, Woodrow Wilson, Winston Churchill, Samuel Gompers, Charles Lindbergh, Florence Nightingale; artists Andrew Wyeth, Yehudi Menuhin, Sean O'Casey, Charlie Chaplin, Claude Monet, and Noel Coward; inventors Thomas Edison and the Wright brothers. One of the world's richest men, the man for whom this hall is named, Andrew Carnegie, was homeschooled until he was nine. He was coaxed into attending school after that, but by the age of thirteen Carnegie left school and never went back. School attendance is not the only way to become a successful sociable adult (p41-42)

Experts have consistently misdiagnosed in misdefined the problem of schooling to serve their own pocketbooks. Difficulty is not the children don't learn to read, write and do arithmetic very well - it is that kids don't learn at all the way schools insist on teaching

When we strip children over primary experience base-as confinement schooling must do to justify its very existence-we destroy the natural sequences of learning which always put experience first. Only much later, after a bath of experience, can the thing cool of abstraction mean anything we haven't forgotten this, but there is just just not much profit in it for the people in the businesses make a bread-and-butter monopoly school. (p81)

Look at the disgrace these 30,000 experts have brought down on this city. Their existence bankrupts the middle class. Look at the nightmare world they have inflicted on our children. My own school district, a wealthy place located mainly between Columbia University and Lincoln Center, was declared in 1989 the worst single school district in New York State - out of more than 700 "competitors"! Worst in reading, worse in math, worst in many other things. Community School District 3, which no more serves the "community" than its version of "public" education serves the public, has, on its northern boundary, Columbia University, just south of that sits the world famous Bank Street College of Education, and on its southern boundary rests Fordham University.

In my 26 years of teaching, none of these fine and arrogant institutions, none of the king's ransom in tax dollars spent by the school district, and none of the feverish rhetoric of the West Side's loud and arrogant political establishment, none of this massed wealth and wisdom has done one tiny bit to alter the nightmare destiny of the children whose minds are put to death in District 3 schools. (p82-83)

Our system of government schooling destroys both mind and character. It prevents the formation of the most precious resource of all - a self. To have a self you can trust it must be singular, it must be bold, it must be brave, resourceful, strong, self-reliant, unfettered. Does anyone in this audience think government schools teach these things? If you do you must be crazy. (p85)

The US is a mirror revealing its builders and they better data is right. the shape of their souls. In a North American system men and women are subjected from childhood to an inexorable process of adaptation; certain principles contained in brief formulas are endlessly repeated by the press, radio, churches, and schools, and by those kindly sinister beings, the North American mothers and wives. A person imprisoned by these schemes is a plan in of flowerpots too small for it; he cannot grow a mature. This sort of conspiracy cannot help but provoke violent individual rebellions. Spontaneity avenges itself... - Octavio Paz (p88)

When you consider how bizarre and implausible much of the conformist machinery put in place during this critical period really was - and especially when you consider how long and successfully simple people resisted this kind of encroachment on fundamental liberty it becomes clear that to understand things like universal medical policing, standing armies and navies which demand constant tribute, universal military training, standardized national examinations, intelligence tests, compulsory education, secret national police forces, the organization of colleges around a scheme called "research" (which makes teaching an unpleasant inconvenience), the secularization of religion, the rise of specialist professional monopoly sanctioned by the state, the cult of total surveillance and all the rest of the "progress" made in the 75 years, you are going to have to find reasons to explain:

- 1) *Why* did it happen *then*?
- 2) *Who* made it happen?
- 3) *What* were they after? (p89-90)

It should be clear that no accidental convergence of historical forces caused the hive world to close in on us. The very clear social and hereditary connection between all zones of the emerging American hive are sign some and some organized intelligence is at work, with some special end in mind. For those who can read the language of conventional symbolism, the philosophical way under investigation here is elegantly represented on the back of our 20th century dollar bill. It represents the extraordinary vision of the learned company of deists who created our national state. Their own vision of democracy would be unrecognizable to most of us, just as the God in which they trusted was indisputably not the God of Christianity, but some great architect of the universe whose curious eye can be found both at the center of

17th century drawings of Solomon's Temple and the top of the pyramid on a dollar bill, a fact I mention to emphasize how well-organized, self-aware, and purposeful this group really was. The eventual goal of their vision, perfected society, could only be achieved according to the blueprint when all human differences were reduced to a minimum and classified into rational hierarchies. In other words, when all men were either perfectly interchangeable, were perfectly subordinated, as are the stones of the pyramid, without complaint or competition. It is the Unitarian utopia I've just described, essentially a universe in which God and family are both superfluous, a world of "ethical culture."

The various ways this ancient idea can be given life through institutions under control of the state are often subtle, but one of them is so startling, and has been realized so closely, it bears comment. As the hive-world was hammered out after the mid-19th century, the notion of unique, irreplaceable natural families came increasingly to be seen as the major roadblock in the path being socially engineered toward the extraordinary vision of our utopian founding fathers. The way to remove this roadblock was to establish national consensus that all families should be "conditional." That is to say, families should be *on trial* with each other and with their neighbors just as a politician is on trial with his constituency... (p90-91)

The subtitle of Darwin's 1859 guidebook to the new order, *Origin of Species* is seldom mentioned these days, but remains sharply instructive, "The Preservation of Favored Races."

Only fools believed favored races of unfavored ones anything except extinction and slavery - despite the injunctions of Christianity - but an ethic of fairness was not completely absent. To correct any mistakes of brute nature this principle was offered: If a man from an unfavored race was willing to surrender his inferior culture and to be as we are (in the words of the Know-Nothing Party) then he would be welcome to participate in a new secular order. Christianity was dying rapidly in 19th century America, but rational scientific orthodoxy moved into position as a spiritual substitute. The brand-new culture of universities in compulsory schooling, Chautauqua and centralized exhortations were to serve as the new Ark of the Covenant. (p92)

The biblical Solomon and Plato both concurred in thinking there was only one right way to do things. Both men have a powerful influence on western political life, and on other utopian thinkers like Charles Darwin. Darwin's notion that life is a contest in which the inferior perish offended the majority of Americans when it was published in 1859. And the grounds of attack were much broader than simply the field of religion; a number of critics recognized that this so-called theory was beyond proof or disproof and in fact constituted a massive piece of elitist rhetoric, quite theologically familiar in its allegations. Darwin's theory was rejected by a cross-section of Americans as they had rejected the notion of compulsory public schooling; this fact is reflected in state legislation well into the 20th century, so recently as 1989 California education authorities felt the necessity to order the teaching of evolution as fact, not theory.

School curricula have never been a matter of democratic choice; biology teachers almost everywhere are ordered by administrators to teach evolution as fact and that is still the case today. The teaching of biology in public schools has been without doubt a major factor in gaining

Darwin's position supremacy.

Here we are face-to-face with the naked mechanism of social engineering. Under no stretch of the imagination can biology teachers actually be deemed "scientists" - they undertake no original experimentation, record no original observations, and publish no new discoveries, they're generally compelled just about everywhere to support whatever view the available textbook supports. This makes them pitchman in scientific drag. Yet Darwin's utopian/dystopian rhetoric was spread efficiently by a fifth column of teachers positioned at key junctures on the youth line. (p106)

An important part of the virulent, sustained attack launched against family institutions of the United States 150 years ago arose from the need of utopians to escape fleshly reality. *Almost all utopian reformers since Plato have been childless*. When the obituary of family life is finally written definitively, forgive me for expecting its author to be somebody who didn't like his own family very much. (p108)

When utopia failed to materialize in reality after the first world war, the national response, in keeping with America's tenacious English bulldog character, has been to try harder. It is high time we stopped and took another look at what is really wrong. Our families aren't dying, they are being killed, quite a different matter.

There are more synonyms for the concept of deceit in the English language than for any other single idea. Does that tell you something about how often dishonesty crosses the Anglo/American mind? And how important Plato has been in the formation of our unconscious national character? We've been tricked into building and maintaining him an inhuman hive-society. If we cannot *persuade* new generations to accept this awful path we reserve the right to intimidate, deceive, contrive, fake, sham, pretend, flimflam, misrepresent, dupe, hype, trick, humbug, love, gammon, rook, cozen and, gull, and so on.

Regimentation, methodization, systematization, standardization, organization, coordination, disciplined arrangements, conformity - these things are at the very heart of our national state policies, and are the poisons that has killed our families and left individual survivors in a numbed, angry, nearly hysterical condition. It's impossible to point the finger at one or another of our institutions to find a target for our wrath - all of them work on a cantilever principle of interlocking directorates now. You can't get a handle on any one of them like childcare or stranger adoption without first fashioning a hypothesis about what is making all of them tick. What is the *destination* of their collective movement?

The deeper I look in the history of an America unable to produce a sane family policy the more I come to see this failure as a byproduct of a comprehensive utopian plan - the standardization of deviant parts of the population by eliminating natural family life and replacing it with synthetic family life. I see a coherent, age-old unity - not all-powerful yet, but stronger every decade - advancing pseudopodia slowly, retracting them at times in the face of passionate opposition, but always flowing forward. Visions like that make you think you've taken leave of your senses.

(p109-110)